



State of Utah

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Department of
Environmental Quality

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Executive Director

DIVISION OF AIR QUALITY
Bryce C. Bird
Director

DAQP-041-21

MEMORANDUM

TO: Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Interim Committee

THROUGH: Kimberly D. Shelley, Executive Director KS

FROM: Bryce C. Bird, Director BCB

DATE: May 14, 2021

SUBJECT: House Bill 353 Reduction of Single Occupancy Vehicle Trips – Interim Report

During the 2019 General Session, the Utah State Legislature passed House Bill 353 (HB353) – Reduction of Single Occupancy Vehicle Trips (Rep. Briscoe) – which directed the Utah Division of Air Quality (UDAQ) to administer a three-year pilot program to designate certain days as “alternative transportation and work days,” to “encourage trip reductions through use of public transportation, carpooling, teleworking, or other methods” on those days, and to analyze the impact of those measures. The Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in funding for the program.

To meet the directives of HB353, UDAQ worked with the Utah Transit Authority (UTA) to develop a free transit fare day program targeting weekdays in January and February – the months when the Wasatch Front is most likely to experience elevated levels of fine particulates (PM_{2.5}). Specifically, the program established alternative transportation and work days to align with UDAQ’s “mandatory action day” forecasts. Weekdays were targeted because the focus of the program was to reduce commuting trips and associated emissions. December was excluded to avoid perturbing pilot program study data with holiday shopping and events (e.g., downtown Salt Lake City Christmas light visitation). The program aimed to reimburse UTA for foregone revenues on approximately six free fare days through June 2022, in an amount not to exceed \$82,000 per day or \$492,000 in total. The remaining \$8,000 were reserved for the required program study and administrative expenses.

During the first winter of the program (January through February 2020), the Wasatch Front did not experience any mandatory action days that met the above-specified criteria (i.e. January and February weekdays).

Beginning in mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes in work and commuting patterns dramatically altered UTA system ridership. A series of special sessions to

address budget concerns also called ongoing program funding into question. After it became clear that funding for the program would remain, UDAQ met with UTA to re-evaluate program parameters for the winter of 2021. With transit ridership down, UDAQ and UTA agreed to revise the foregone revenue reimbursement levels to up to \$25,000 per day for the winter of 2021 and up to \$82,000 per day for the winter of 2022 upon confirmation of a resumption of “normal” ridership levels. The other program parameters were left more or less unchanged. However, as in the winter of 2020, the Wasatch Front did not experience any mandatory action days that met program criteria.

Because of the looming program end-date of June 30, 2022, and the lack of any free fare days to-date for the pilot study, UDAQ recently began working with UTA to expand the program to cover any mandatory action weekdays for the remainder of the program. This expansion will help target days with elevated ozone levels during the summer of 2021 in addition to high-particulate days in the winter of 2021-2022 and would increase the likelihood of obtaining study data.

Please direct questions to Glade Sowards, of my staff, at 801-536-4020 or gladesowards@utah.gov.